

THE EFFECTS OF DIRECTNESS OF FACE-TO-FACE REQUESTS AND SEX OF SOLICITOR ON STREETCORNER DONATIONS*

Ohio University

SVENN LINDSKOLD, ROBERT A. FORTE, CHARLES S. HAAKE, AND
EDWARD K. SCHMIDT

SUMMARY

Approximately 3000 male and female pedestrians (mostly college students) were solicited for a donation to a charitable organization. Three male and three female undergraduates served as solicitors and made either a direct, face-to-face appeal or a less direct, impersonal appeal. As hypothesized, the direct appeal was more successful than the impersonal appeal. Also, donors receiving the direct appeal gave larger amounts when the traffic was comparatively light, but the proportion giving was unaffected by traffic density. The sex of the solicitor made a difference only with the impersonal appeal. Females may be viewed as more trustworthy in situations in which suspicion of the genuineness of the request is most relevant; face-to-face requests of a relatively nonsuspicious kind may appear equally trustworthy whether made by male or female solicitors.

A. INTRODUCTION

Organizations such as the Salvation Army have long followed the practice in the United States of fund-raising through the public solicitation of small sums. Different approaches are used in making these solicitations. The Salvation Army stations a bell ringer next to a kettle, and the bell ringer does not approach passersby but only thanks those who give. The same passive practice is followed by the pitiful cripple selling pencils at storefronts. However, more active and direct practices are sometimes used. As you approach a street corner, a youngster in a band uniform may extend a canister in your direction and ask you to make a contribution in connec-

* Received in the Editorial Office, Provincetown, Massachusetts, on December 17, 1975, and given special consideration in accordance with our policy for field research. Copyright, 1977, by The Journal Press.

tion with some upcoming special event. The bell ringer and the cripple rely on what their appearance symbolizes to activate in the passerby the obligation to give. The active solicitor has a message to convey and hopes that his person-to-person appeal will be successful both in identifying his need and winning support from the target person.

Because the active solicitor personally encounters the target, his characteristics, such as attractiveness and perceived trustworthiness, should be instrumental in his success. The passive solicitor is less personal, relying for success more on felt obligation on the part of the target than on persuasive ability on his own part. In a more abstract sense, the active solicitor attempts to capitalize on source characteristics which are relevant to social influence, while the passive solicitor relies on the perceived legitimacy [social responsibility norm (1)] of his request. Even though the encounter is brief, direct face-to-face persuasion permits a variety of nonverbal factors to operate which are implicated in the effectiveness of the persuader (7). Therefore, it is hypothesized that the active solicitor is more successful than the passive one.

A second hypothesis is that the active solicitor is more effective in a sparsely populated environment than in a heavy press of people on the sidewalk. Contact with the potential donor is more direct and the donor has less opportunity to be inattentive to the request or to escape it (8).

Finally, it can be expected that certain apparent characteristics of a solicitor are influential in determining perceived legitimacy and, hence, his persuasiveness. Both the Salvation Army bell ringer and the high school bandsman, for example, wear their uniforms to remove ambiguity regarding their legitimacy and apparent trustworthiness. Another visible characteristic is the sex of the solicitor. Although there is little evidence that females are more successful as persuaders in general, Latané and Darley (4) found they were more successful than males when asking for a dime or 20 cents on the streets of New York. But women were no more successful than men when making other minor requests. Women may activate more nurturant behavior than men—especially in men—and, although there is no evidence to support this assumption, female solicitors may also be perceived as more trustworthy than males because being a panhandler or con-man may be more out-of-role (3) for females than for males in our culture (4, p. 15). For the present study it was hypothesized that trustworthiness, attractiveness, and the nurturant-arousing characteristics of females are activated more forcefully in a direct, face-to-face encounter than in a passive encounter.

These three hypotheses were tested in a field study in which collections for a charitable organization were made on a street corner in a small city.

B. METHOD

1. *Design*

Solicitations were made either by using a direct, face-to-face appeal or by making a nondirect, impersonal appeal. They were made either when traffic on the sidewalk was relatively dense or relatively sparse; however, because the impersonal appeal was unrealistic when traffic was sparse, there was no sparse-impersonal condition. The solicitor was either male or female.

2. *Subjects*

Approximately 3000 pedestrians (predominantly college students) at a streetcorner in Athens, Ohio functioned as Ss. The Ohio University campus joins the downtown business district at this corner. Actual and approximate *ns* are given in Table 1. Approximate figures had to be used in some impersonal condition comparisons, since it was impossible at times to determine exactly how many persons were passing within the "request range" of the solicitor. Some imprecision in these estimates would little affect the significance level of the statistics reported.

3. *Procedure*

Three male and three female¹ undergraduates served as solicitors; they worked one at a time. They were attired as typical college students, but they wore a three-inch diameter "Athens County Society for Crippled Children and Adults" badge and carried a Society canister. Each worked once, for 15 minutes, under each of three conditions: dense-direct, dense-impersonal, and sparse-direct. Dense conditions were run at class change times, while sparse conditions were run on the half-hour. The average number of passersby was approximately 300 in dense periods and 150 in sparse periods.

The direct request involved prolonged eye-contact with the prospective donor and the request, "Excuse me, would you like to contribute to the crippled children, please?" The impersonal request was made by calling out, "Give to the crippled children," passing the canister in a wide arc, and making only fleeting eye-contact with the potential donors.

¹ The authors are grateful to Cyndy Been, Edith McCullough, and Kay Pittinger for their capable assistance.

Roughly equal numbers of male and female passersby were approached by each solicitor in the direct condition. This was accomplished by trying to alternate requests of males and females. An observer stationed nearby recorded the number of *Ss* solicited and contributing, by sex, in the direct condition and the number contributing in the impersonal condition, by sex. Estimates of the number passing the corner within range of the solicitor were made for all conditions. The male/female mix was about equal.

So that the population would be comparable at the time of each solicitation, collections were not made between 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM to avoid the heavy lunchtime traffic consisting of University employees and townspeople. If there were another solicitation being conducted at the time the solicitor arrived at the corner, her or his performance was rescheduled. If someone else was at the corner handing out literature or selling tickets, the collection was made. Because this is such a central and popular corner there usually was another person working the corner for one cause or another.

The total amount of money collected during each solicitation was counted. This permitted a calculation of the mean amount donated by *Ss* in each period. However, since the amount of each *S*'s contribution could not be determined, statistical analyses were allowed only in terms of mean amount collected by each solicitor. All money collected was turned over to the Athens County Society for Crippled Children and Adults.

C. RESULTS

The results are summarized in Table 1. As hypothesized, the solicitors were much more successful in terms of proportion donating in the dense-direct (counting only those *Ss* directly asked) than in the dense-impersonal condition, $\chi^2 = 287.2$, $p < .001$. If all passersby in the direct condition are included, whether asked or not, the comparison, with 1200 *Ss* per condition, is still strongly significant, $\chi^2 = 35.13$, $p < .001$.

The second hypothesis was that a greater proportion of those *Ss* receiving the direct request would give in the sparse condition than in the dense condition. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. However, the average amount per donor collected by each solicitor in the sparse-direct condition, 22.5¢, was greater, $t(10) = 2.12$, $p < .05$ one-tailed, than the average amount in the dense-direct condition, 17.2¢. This difference suggests that the pressure on the donor to give was greater in the sparse condition.

When all conditions are examined together, the sex of the solicitor

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF *Ss* ASKED AND CONTRIBUTING IN EACH CELL OF THE DESIGN

Traffic density and type of request	Male solicitor				Female solicitor			
	Male	<i>Ss</i>	Female	<i>Ss</i>	Male	<i>Ss</i>	Female	<i>Ss</i>
Dense-impersonal ^a	300	(3)	300	(2)	300	(17)	300	(9)
Dense-personal	58	(23)	65	(19)	75	(29)	85	(25)
Sparse-personal	56	(20)	67	(23)	60	(21)	68	(21)

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number donating.

^a Number asked is approximate.

affected the number of donors only among male *Ss*; more of them gave to female solicitors than to male solicitors, $\chi^2 = 3.39$, $p < .05$. But, when male *Ss*' response in the direct and the impersonal conditions are separately analyzed, it appears that female solicitors were more successful than male solicitors only in the impersonal condition, $\chi^2 = 10.14$, $p < .005$. Female *Ss* also gave proportionately more often to female than to male solicitors in the impersonal condition only, $\chi^2 = 4.54$, $p < .05$. These results suggest that the trustworthiness of a rather passive solicitor rather than either the personal qualities of a direct solicitor or the nurturant responses of male *Ss* to female solicitors created the sex difference in solicitor effectiveness.

D. DISCUSSION

The finding that the direct request was more successful than the impersonal one supported the first hypothesis and also provided some firm evidence for the assumption that face-to-face appeals are superior to less direct ones in persuasion or attitude change. The evidence supporting this assumption so far has only compared spoken communications to written ones (6).

Some support was obtained for the second hypothesis that the direct appeal was more effective in a sparsely populated environment than in a densely populated environment. However, the finding that donors gave more in the former than in the latter condition indicates that more pressure and less opportunity for escaping the full brunt of the appeal was present in the sparse condition. It was not a matter of the donor being inattentive when the crowd was dense. What is suggested is that he could slip away more easily with less commitment, less deep digging into his pocket, and less monitoring and censure by the solicitor. If the dense condition permitted easier ignoring of the direct request, the proportion of *Ss* who responded to the direct request would have been less in the dense condition than in the sparse condition. This difference was not found.

The only clear effect of the sex of the solicitor was that both male and female *Ss* gave more in response to the impersonal appeal of women than of men. The effect was greater for male *Ss* than for female *Ss*, suggesting that charitable nurturance may have been more strongly activated in the males by the female solicitor. But it would appear that the most important factor is that attributions of trustworthiness regarding a solicitor who made only fleeting eye contact were greater when the solicitor was female. When male solicitors made a direct appeal to the potential donor they apparently were able to remove skepticism regarding their trustworthiness.

Latané and Darley (4) found females to be more successful than males in asking for a dime or for 20 cents for the subway; but these were direct requests, and there were no effects of sex of solicitor with direct requests in the present study. The requests in the Latané and Darley study may have activated more suspicion, since the money was to go to the solicitor and not to an identifiable charity. It might be speculated that trustworthiness characteristics of the solicitor or of his request may interact with the sex of the solicitor so that sex makes a difference only when some degree of lack of trust exists. Latané and Darley found no differences of sex of the solicitor when the time, directions, or change for a quarter were sought. Male *Ss* gave their names to females more often than to males, and female *Ss* were relatively noncompliant to this request when either a male or a female asked. A request for one's name seems to be an obvious one which arouses suspicion of the requester's motives.

One could speculate that, when a difference does exist, women are more persuasive than men. The literature indicates that women tend to be more persuasible than men (6) although there are many exceptions to this trend. But there also is evidence that women tend at times to be more persuasive than men. Luchins and Luchins (5) found that men conformed more to the erroneous judgments of a female partner than to those of a male partner. Fryrear and Thelen (2) found that a female was a more effective model of affectionate behavior than a male with nursery school girls, but not with boys. Stevenson (9) found women to be more effective dispensers of social reinforcement than men when preschool children were the *Ss*, but there was no sex difference with elementary and preadolescent children. The relative greater nurturant and trustworthiness qualities of the female stereotype may be evidenced in these findings as they were derived from social situations in which such qualities would be expected to be activated.

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Department of Psychology
Ohio University
Porter Hall
Athens, Ohio 45701

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